UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/48/142
3 May 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-eighth session

REQUEST FOR THE INCLUSION OF AN ITEM IN THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION

UNITED NATIONS INITIATIVE ON OPPORTUNITY AND PARTICIPATION

Letter dated 28 April 1993 from the Permanent Representative of Papua New Guinea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

It is an honour and pleasure for me to submit to you, on behalf of the Government of Papua New Guinea, its request, in accordance with rule 13 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, for inclusion in the provisional agenda of the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly, of an item entitled "United Nations Initiative on Opportunity and Participation".

Like their counterparts in other developing countries, the people and Government of Papua New Guinea, on whose behalf the proposal was first raised during the general debate of the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session, last October, have first-hand experience of the difficulties that limit economic opportunity and participation.

We are aware and appreciative of the work being carried out by the United Nations, particularly in the context of the Fourth United Nations Development Decade and preparation of the proposed agenda for development, to identify, publicize and deal with the international aspects.

We also believe that it is particularly appropriate to seek support for the establishment of a panel of eminent and experienced persons to study and report on opportunity and participation in the economies of developing countries as follows:

(a) During the year immediately following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development;

(b) During the International Year for the World's Indigenous Peoples;

(c) During the year preceding the forthcoming World Summit for Social Development, the International Conference on Population and Development and the Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

The people and the Government of Papua New Guinea, therefore, respectfully seek support from Members of the United Nations for inclusion of the proposed item in the agenda of the forty-eighth session of the General Assembly. In addition, we respectfully request that the item be allocated for consideration to plenary meeting of the General Assembly.

In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, an explanatory memorandum concerning this request, is annexed to the present letter. Your kind assistance in circulating the present letter and its annex as an official document of the General Assembly would be most appreciated.

The Government of Papua New Guinea is convinced that, in an increasingly interdependent world, the likely costs of implementing the proposal cannot compare with the burden of continuing failure to pay due attention to: (a) difficulties, (b) options which might be employed, and (c) the need for action, in widening opportunity and participation in the economies, particularly for citizens of developing countries.

(Signed) Renagi R. LOHIA, OBE
Ambassador/Permanent representative

ANNEX

Explanatory memorandum

PROPOSED UNITED NATIONS INITIATIVE ON OPPORTUNITY AND PARTICIPATION

1. Current trends in national economies, regional economic co-operation and international economic relations combine to make it both timely and urgent for the United Nations to commission a comprehensive, systematic and thorough study of opportunity and participation, with particular reference to the economies of developing countries.

2. The case for proceeding with the proposal now is underlined by the reality that - even after several decades of United Nations Resolutions, expert studies, special international conferences, including North-South dialogue, and plans of action-

   (a) many developing countries are experiencing static or declining rates of economic growth; while

   (b) many of the most important, powerful and widespread difficulties experienced in securing opportunities for economic participation by individuals, groups and firms in developing countries remain largely unattended.

3. In an increasingly interdependent world, the proposal is all the more compelling because of the vital implications that the issues with which it is intended to deal would have for efforts to:

   (a) reduce tensions between nations, foster co-operation within and between regions, and secure global peace;

   (b) bring about development which is environmentally sustainable and socially responsible; and

   (c) ensure that basic human needs are met.

4. Intended to focus on difficulties which lie in the way of creating, maintaining, consolidating, diversifying and expanding opportunities for economic participation within developing countries, the proposed study has immediate relevance - and the resulting report should make a direct contribution - to:

   (a) preparation of the proposed United Nations Agenda for Development; and

   (b) current discussions concerning the appropriate role of government in national, regional and international economic life, both in theory and practice - as well as the changes actually occurring in the scope and nature of government intervention.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSED STUDY

5. While current, widely-held economic theories, policies and strategies place increasing emphasis on individuals, groups and firms realising opportunities for economic participation for themselves, experience in many developing countries suggests that, in practice, they often have great - and even growing difficulty - in doing so.

6. Relevant factors include:

   (a) continuation - and growth - of both tariff and non-tariff barriers to international trade, including established commercial connections and communications links;

   (b) increasing competition - and openings - for private overseas investment and loans on commercial terms; as well as

   (c) rising pressure on limited - and often declining - sources of official and non-governmental assistance on concessional terms.

7. Despite some successes in limiting population growth, demand is growing much faster than supply as far as opportunities - particularly, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible opportunities - for economic participation by the people of most developing countries are concerned.

8. The situation is, moreover, becoming rapidly worse as a result of:

(a) continuing failure to conclude the Uruguay Round of negotiations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade - and the consequent threat of mounting economic conflict between rival trade blocs;

(b) the additional needs, openings and request for scarce investment and loan funds generated by political realignments at the end of the Cold War; and

(c) the difficulties which aid recipients are experiencing in countering the effects of "aid fatigue" in traditional donor countries, particularly when the needs of other claimants for economic restructuring, cleaning up the environment, and dealing with the effects of natural and human disasters are so pressing - and frequently reinforced by the pull of ideological, regional or other special ties.

9. The kinds of factors outlined above - which appear to arise and to affect developing countries in an international context - have been quite frequently discussed, both within the United Nations and outside.

10. But progress in dealing with their effects has been slow. Lasting success in slowing them down or reducing them has been difficult to achieve. The prospects for halting, overcoming or reversing them have seemed not only to be distant but, at times, to be receding.

11. Moreover, other factors, which have tended to receive rather less attention, also play an important - and sometimes a more important - part in limiting opportunity and participation in the economies of developing countries. They include factors which appear to affect developing countries, whether or not they arise, from within.

12. The proposed United Nations study of opportunity and participation in the economies of developing countries is intended to focus attention on such previously-neglected factors.

FOCUS AND DISTINGUISHING FEATURE OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

13. The principal focus of the proposed United Nations study is also its distinguishing feature: identification of both difficulties - and options which might be employed - in widening opportunity and participation in the economies of developing countries.

14. The kinds of issues which might be subjected to detailed examination include:

(a) lack of incentive - and all-too-often active disincentives - even for commercial firms which are willing, whether for reasons of economy or security, to allow, encourage or actively stimulate wider opportunities for participation in ownership, employment or provision of support services and supplies;

(b) failure by financial institutions to develop procedures which would enable prospective borrowers to realise otherwise promising projects by drawing on sources of security and capital which do not have - and may not be readily given - a monetary value (such as personal skills and land held under traditional title);

(c) shortcomings in legal regimes which do not recognise traditional, evolving or other particular, local forms of social organisation, or cannot cope adequately with change, including succession;

(d) inequities resulting from administrative arrangements which do not - and often cannot - ensure equitable access to vital information, advice or other kinds of assistance;

(e) strategies which are inadequate or inappropriate to stated objectives or to the capacity of targeted populations to respond; and

(f) policies which do not take sufficient account of the diverse values, skills and other resources of different segments of individual nations.

The factors outlined are often embodied in laws, practices and institutions imposed, inherited or otherwise imported from other countries without due consideration of their appropriateness to local conditions.

15. In countries with land, seas or other natural resources which still have substantial unrealised potential, many of the factors outlined in Paragraph 14 above apply with particular force to opportunity and participation by citizens in almost every aspect of development, ownership, control, management, employment, service and supply of natural resource projects.

16. The shortage - or absence - of opportunities to acquire education, training and experience appropriate to effective participation in the economies of developing countries is often important too.

17. The factors which limit opportunity and participation by citizens in the economies of developing countries arise from the actions - and inaction - of diverse agencies, including elements in:

(a) the private sector;

(b) government at all levels - national, local and (where appropriate) intermediate; and

(c) regional and wider inter-governmental organisations.

18. Even bodies established with the specific purpose of promoting economic development may be partly responsible - for example, when foreign aid donors or lenders fail to ensure that local contractors or contractors from other developing countries can compete fairly to undertake projects (while respect for the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of states may be cited in justification of what does - or does not - occur, it is not always an adequate explanation).

19. The proposed United Nations study is intended both to identify and to focus attention on:

(a) underlying causes; as well as

(b) possible remedies.

20. While focusing on the particular circumstances of developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America (including, respectively, the Middle East, the South Pacific and the Caribbean), the report which results should draw on experiences - and be relevant to significant, current concerns - in advanced industrial and industrialising countries where efforts are being made to increase economic opportunity and participation: in Europe, North America, Asia and elsewhere.

21. The issues and options identified are likely to be especially pertinent in any country where public expenditures on arms are being reduced - and options for wider economic opportunity and participation are being sought.

THE PROPOSAL ITSELF

22. The proposal itself is-

- for the appointment of a small panel of distinguished, expert and experienced persons, broadly representative of the international community,

- to prepare a comprehensive, systematic and thorough report in time for consideration during the fiftieth session of the United Nations General Assembly,

- on difficulties which have been encountered - and options which might be employed - in widening opportunity and participation in the economies of developing countries.

23. The study should be multi-disciplinary in character, identifying issues, problems and possible options in law, economics and banking, public policy and administration, as well as other fields.

24. While drawing on appropriate scholarly and other insights, the report should pay particular attention to practical experiences and options.

25. The project should support and complement - not duplicate or rival - the proposed Agenda for Development being prepared by the United Nations Secretary-General.

26. It should facilitate exchanges of experiences and ideas.

27. The panel of distinguished, expert and experienced persons responsible for producing the report should be established - with terms of reference approved - by Resolution of the United Nations General Assembly.

28. The Secretary-General should report to the General Assembly, at intervals of not more than twelve months, on progress being made in implementation of the Resolution.

CONTEXT AND SUPPORT OF THE PROPOSAL

29. Like their counterparts in other developing countries, the people and Government of Papua New Guinea, on whose behalf the proposal was first raised during the General Debate of the Forty-Seventh United Nations General Assembly, have firsthand experience of the difficulties which limit economic opportunity and participation.

30. They are aware - and appreciative - of the work being carried out by the United Nations, particularly in the context of the Fourth United Nations Development Decade and preparation of the proposed Agenda for Development, to identify, publicise and deal with the international aspects.

31. They are also aware - and appreciative - of the contributions being made by specialised agencies of the United Nations, global financial and banking institutions, as well as participants in the Lome Convention, the Commonwealth and a wide variety of regional organisations, including the South Pacific Forum, the Association of South East Asian Nations, the Organisation for African Unity and the Organisation of American States.

32. They are conscious of, grateful for, and actively involved in, efforts being made by the Non-Aligned Movement and the Group of Seventy-Seven to draw the world's attention to the particular problems of developing countries, and to co-operating in order to bring about change.

33. They believe that it is particularly appropriate to seek support for the establishment of a panel to report on opportunity and participation in the economies of developing countries during the year:

- immediately following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development,

- proclaimed as the International Year of Indigenous Peoples, and

- preceding the forthcoming United Nations Conference on Social Development, the International Conference on Population and Development, and the Global Conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

34. They, therefore, respectfully seek support from members of the United Nations for inclusion of the proposal as an item in the agenda for the Forty-Eighth United Nations General Assembly.

35. Conscious of the acute financial situation of the United Nations, they also respectively request other members to join them in ensuring that the proposal is provided with the modest funding, staffing and other resources needed for implementation.

36. They do so believing that the proposed report is likely to be of value not only in developing countries but in any country or body where economic opportunity and participation are major, current concerns, including:

(a) countries in Europe, North America, Asia and elsewhere, which are-

- industrialised,
- industrialising, or
- undergoing significant economic reform, and

(b) government, inter-governmental and non-government organisations interested in development issues and engaged in North-South or South-South co-operation, including transfers to developing countries of aid and technical assistance, loans and/or investment funds.

37. They are convinced that, in an increasingly interdependent world, the likely costs of implementing the proposal cannot compare with the burden of continuing failure to pay due attention to-

- difficulties,
- options which might be employed, and
- the need for action,

in widening opportunity and participation in the economies, particularly for citizens, of developing countries.

20 April 1993